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CIA/PAPAL PLOT BROKAW: And the Polish government today turned down Pope John Paul's appeal for amnesty for jail supporters of Solidarity. For months now, there have been reports that Bulgaria, acting for the Soviet Union, was behind the attempt on the pope's life two years ago. Marvin Kalb reports tonight that in this country the top officials of the CIA are now leaning away from that theory.

KALB: CIA Director William Casey has changed his mind and now believes there may not have been a Bulgarian connection in the papal assassination plot. This change, confirmed by a key CIA source, represents a victory of sorts for Casey's deputies who have not only been skeptical of the connection, they have also worked with their three top agents in Rome to discredit it. When this approach came to light, State Department officials demanded and got an investigation. It was conducted by the CIA, which cleared its agents, a statement department officials later called a whitewash. To build their case, CIA officials point to intelligence from Rome that Serge Antonov, the Bulgarian arrested for complicity in the plot, may soon be released, perhaps as part of a swap for two Italians held in Bulgaria. But checks by NBC News reveal that yes, the Bulgarians have again proposed a swap, but the Italians have said no, that the judicial investigation will continue. CIA officials have also persuaded Casey that *Judge Eladio Martella, who's leading the investigation, does not seem to be getting anywhere. Again, checks reveal that Martella believes he is making steady progress and intends to bring Antonov to trial by October. Finally, CIA officials say the New York Times was sold a bill of goods when it quoted a Bulgarian defector as saying he knew about the plot and had informed the French Secret Service. The CIA says the defector was lying because if the French really had that information, they'd have shared it with the agency. But the fact is they had it but refused to share it, leaving the CIA in the dark. Officials of other intelligence agencies tend to believe that either the CIA is trying to cover up some of its activities in Italy or that it's trying to protect a presidential option for a Reagan-Andropov summit within the next year. But one White House source insists the President, despite Casey, supports the Italian investigation no matter where it leads. Marvin Kalb, NBC News, the State Department.

BROKAW: That's Nightly News for this Tuesday night. I'm Tom Brokaw in New York.

MUDD: And I'm Roger Mudd in Washington. Good night from all of us at NBC News.